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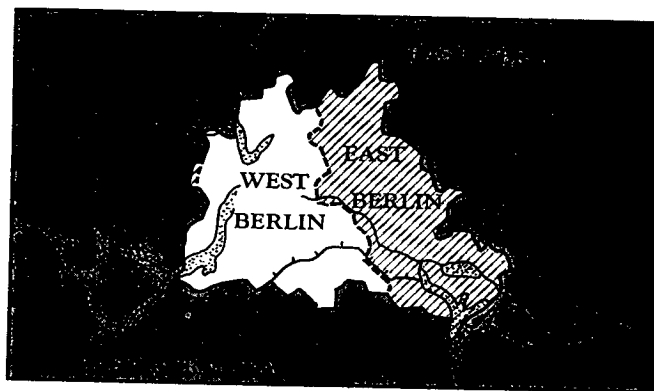
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TS 142352c
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SNIE 2-2-61
11 July 1961

SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

SOVIET AND OTHER REACTIONS TO
POSSIBLE US COURSES OF ACTION
WITH RESPECT TO BERLIN

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C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

11 July 1961

SUBJECT: SNIE 2-2-61: SOVIET AND OTHER REACTIONS TO POSSIBLE
US COURSES OF ACTION WITH RESPECT TO
BERLIN

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the probable reactions of the USSR, Communist China, the NATO members, and certain other countries to a set of measures reflecting US determination to preserve the Western position in Berlin. These measures include military, political, economic, and clandestine preparations designed both to convey US intentions to undertake steps up to and including, if necessary, general war, and to put the US in a position to carry out these steps.

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THE ESTIMATE

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS UNDERLYING SOVIET REACTIONS

1. Attitude to War. The Soviet leaders are confident of the prospects for advancing their cause by means short of all-out war. We continue to believe that, so long as they remain vulnerable to US strategic power, they will not willingly enter into situations in which, by their calculations, the risks of general war are substantial.^{1/} Similarly, they will not wish to set in train a course of events leading to local war in an area like Central Europe, where the dangers of escalation to general nuclear war are high. However, they believe that as their own strength has grown, the US has become increasingly deterred by the same considerations and that the risks of aggressive actions on their part have been correspondingly reduced. Thus the chances have increased that the Soviets may so miscalculate Western responses as to precipitate a situation from which neither side would feel able to withdraw.

^{1/} The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, believes that this sentence should be extended to point out that the USSR would probably draw back in almost any such situation which might arise, as previously estimated in paragraph 146 of NIE 11-4-60, "Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies, 1960-1965," dated 1 December 1960. He therefore believes that the following should be added to this sentence: "and will endeavor to draw back from such situations should they evolve."

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2. Prestige. While important substantive considerations motivate the Communist endeavor to gain control of West Berlin, Soviet prestige, and that of Khrushchev himself, is already heavily involved. The Soviet leaders are especially sensitive on this score, feeling that their country, long regarded as backward, has not been accorded the world position to which its power and achievements entitle it. They are therefore the more anxious that their recently acquired strength should not be derogated. Closely linked to this, they have in recent years made a central proposition of their claim that the "world relation of forces" is inexorably shifting in their favor. They will be greatly concerned that any outcome of the Berlin situation which appeared to confound this proposition would deflate their recent successes and darken their future prospects for political advance.

3. Freedom of Action. We believe that this desire to protect and increase their prestige, at home as well as abroad, is at this stage a major factor impinging on Soviet freedom of action in the Berlin question. We recognize that the Chinese Communists exert a constant pressure on the USSR for a generally harder line against the West, and the East German regime does

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the same on the specific issue of Berlin. We believe, however, that Soviet positions on as potentially explosive a question as this are firmly grounded in considerations of self-interest and relatively immune to such pressures. There are no indications of differences over Berlin within the Soviet leadership.

4. Assessment of Local Factors. The Soviets consider that the geography of the Berlin problem confers great advantages upon them. They are therefore prone to believe that, sooner or later, the West will have to acknowledge its local military inferiority and begin to acquiesce in Soviet demands. In the meantime, the Soviets need not fear in Berlin, as they often must in non-Bloc areas, that their opportunities are fleeting and must be seized or lost; they are conscious that, as the situation stands today, the choice of timing and method remain, except perhaps in a full crisis, largely within their control.

II. SOME SPECIFIC SOVIET REACTIONS

5. Specific Soviet reactions to individual US moves would, of course, depend heavily upon a number of immediate related factors. In general, however, the foregoing considerations provide

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some indication of the manner in which the USSR might interpret and respond to various US measures. We discuss in the final section their general reaction to the totality of Western measures.

6. Military Measures. The USSR would be anxious, in the military field above all, to prove that it could not be intimidated. The militant note struck at the recent anniversary of Hitler's invasion and the display of strength made on Aviation Day were almost certainly designed to serve this purpose. To the same end, Khrushchev has announced a large increase in defense expenditures and suspended the scheduled reduction of Soviet forces. In response to US moves to strengthen its forces in Europe, the USSR would almost certainly undertake equivalent moves and make recurrent tangible demonstrations of its strength. The USSR might increase its forces in Poland and Germany or undertake some mobilization of reserves, particularly if the US went on to further military preparations. Additionally, the Soviets might hint or declare that they were stationing nuclear weapons with Soviet forces in East Germany or give indications of their strength in medium and intercontinental range missiles. US measures to increase its readiness for general nuclear war would almost certainly provoke Soviet measures to improve readiness.

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Clearly the timing and pace of measures specifically relating to US readiness for nuclear war would greatly affect the whole Soviet attitude.

7. Economic Measures. The Soviets probably would not react very seriously to purely contingent decisions to undertake NATO embargoes and to deny the use of NATO transport facilities. They would retain doubts that such decisions would be fully implemented or persisted in. However, they would observe NATO planning in this sphere as an important test of the unity which the Alliance could muster over the Berlin question. Harmonious Western agreement on far-reaching economic sanctions would probably increase the resolve which the USSR attributed to the NATO members on this issue. This factor might in turn carry over to its estimate of NATO's willingness to use military force. However, we must recognize that there is an inherent danger that the USSR would consider that economic or other measures within the overall program, and not the determination to use military force if necessary, represent the extent of our real intentions.

8. Measures Aimed at the Satellites. The Soviets probably believe that the West has at present only a limited capability

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to stir up dissidence in East Germany. But if attempts to demonstrate such a capability succeeded, the Soviets would recognize and perhaps even overrate the vulnerability of the GDR regime, especially as tensions increased. They would probably be much less concerned on this score in the other Satellites. Measures of this sort would produce contradictory pressures on the Soviet leaders. An overt effort by the West to stimulate dissidence in East Germany and elsewhere in Eastern Europe through public statements and appeals to the population would probably produce a stiffening of Soviet resolve. If, however, private Western warnings and clandestine activities convinced Moscow that a Berlin crisis could provoke a covertly supported wave of disorders in the Satellites, then the Soviets might be inclined to proceed more cautiously in their moves against Berlin.^{2/}

^{2/} The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, offers the comment that the Soviets would be susceptible to pressures in this field only if the West produced evidence of a capability to support and protect anti-Soviet-regime movements. Without such evidence, he believes that the proposed activities would tend to firm the Soviets' determination to eliminate Western control and influence in West Berlin.

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9. Political Measures. As the posited US course of action unfolded, the Soviets would be alert to signs that it signified a fundamental shift in US policy which could affect the East-West competition on a broader front than Central Europe. In this connection, they would probably interpret steps to undertake a sustained expansion of the US defense effort as portending a generally harder and more aggressive American line over the entire range of confrontation. They would regard this as undesirable because they would believe that this turn in US policy would make it difficult to elicit a US response to possible future "soft tactics." This consideration, we believe, would weigh as heavily with them as would the prospect that they might have to adjust their economic plans over a long period in order to keep pace with the US effort with increased military expenditures of their own.

10. Measures Aimed at World Opinion. The USSR would certainly take the US courses of action postulated in our problem into full account in its already substantial propaganda campaign on the Berlin question. It would calculate that Western preparations of this sort would provide a hitherto unparalleled opportunity to heighten apprehensions in Europe and divide the members of NATO.

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Soviet efforts to influence European opinion would therefore place heavy stress on Soviet military might and the consequences of nuclear war, while at the same time emphasizing that, for the USSR's part, the path of negotiation remained open. For non-European audiences, the USSR would probably concentrate upon the alleged peaceful nature of its proposals and attempt to contrast them with the warlike posture of its opponents. It would seek to portray the West as lacking constructive political suggestions and unwilling to negotiate on a problem which endangered world peace.

III. REACTIONS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

The Members of NATO

11. A US program of preparatory measures intended to demonstrate Western resolution over Berlin, and involving a commitment to general war if necessary, would confront NATO with a crucial test of the viability of the alliance. The immediate consequence in the NAC would probably be a strengthening of NATO's cohesion in the face of an impending crisis, coupled with a sense of relief that the US was asserting leadership.

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However, an undercurrent of misgiving would exist from the start, and if Western measures failed to produce a visibly sobering effect on the USSR, this feeling would grow. At this point, demands for an exhaustive attempt at negotiations would rapidly pick up strength. The chances are good that the members would cooperate in joint planning for contingency actions, but if tensions continued to increase, indications would probably arise that some of the members would be unwilling, in the final analysis, to resort to military action. In a time of crisis, much would depend on the actions of West Germany, France, and the UK.

12. West Germany. The West German Government would be quick to support in principle and cooperate in a NATO-wide comprehensive program of the sort postulated here. The German authorities would feel committed to follow the US lead on military preparations for a possible Berlin crisis, fearing that their failure to accept the same risks as the US would discredit the Federal Republic within the NATO alliance and have far-reaching adverse consequences for German interests in Berlin. The Germans are keenly aware of the existence of reservations concerning Berlin policy in the UK and other NATO countries, and they would

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react to various proposals with an eye to strengthening the hand of those in NATO who are urging a more militant policy on Berlin.

13. At the same time, Bonn would increase its insistence that it be granted full participation in all future Allied contingency planning for Berlin. With regard to specific military measures, German defense officials would be likely to object strenuously to any changes in the control arrangements for nuclear weapons which in their view indicated that these might not be available to the NATO shield forces. We believe, however, that they would not press these objections to the point of intransigence during a period of crisis over Berlin.

14. We believe that the West German public would, by and large, follow the lead of the national government. The political opposition and a sizable segment of the press would probably accept contingency planning and actual measures of preparedness but would urge, with increasing vigor as the crisis deepened, that another round of negotiations be tried and that political and economic measures be employed before military moves were undertaken.

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15. France. As long as General de Gaulle remains in office, France will almost certainly maintain a posture of unequivocal firmness on the Berlin question. De Gaulle's long historical perspective and his personal experiences in international diplomacy have convinced him that resoluteness is the best weapon in dealing with an opponent. He is already emphasizing the primary importance of France's European obligations; he has announced the withdrawal of one division from Algeria and has indicated that additional forces, including some air units, will be on the way shortly. We believe that as the crisis sharpened he would be under growing public pressure to soften the French position on Berlin but that he will continue to dominate French foreign policy.

16. While de Gaulle could be expected to lend his support to a set of comprehensive preparatory measures, he might in addition wish to use the Berlin crisis as one more proof of the need for a tripartite global directorate, nuclear sharing, and reorganization of NATO. However, even if he received no satisfaction on these matters, we believe his position vis-a-vis the Soviets and the Berlin problem would not change significantly.

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17. The UK. While the UK has recently shown itself content to follow US initiative in contingency planning for the Berlin problem, we believe that current British firmness in the face of Soviet bluster is designed mainly to prepare the way for a new attempt at negotiation. The major considerations guiding British policy will be: (a) the credibility of the US deterrent; (b) the UK's vulnerability; (c) the adequacy of NATO's conventional capabilities; and (d) the sensitivity of the British public to any government moves that might bring on a hot war.

18. Public apprehension over the possibility that the UK might become engaged in a nuclear war would rise sharply as US preparatory actions gave unmistakable evidence of the seriousness of US determination. Further, British officials would almost certainly judge that there was insufficient time to strengthen their conventional forces on the Continent to the point where those forces could provide a high threshold before the introduction of tactical nuclear weapons. The British field commanders already regard NATO capabilities to fight without nuclear weapons as extremely low. Accordingly, the UK would seek to insure against a situation arising in which it lost to

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the US all initiative in the determination of strategy. With this end in view, it would almost certainly demand an opening of negotiations with the Soviets before agreeing to participate fully in the proposed measures, and would actively solicit the support of other NATO members in this endeavor. At the same time the UK will continue to give support to the US contingency planning. However, formal UK support for an allied policy of firmness in Berlin would probably be undercut by evidences of a British desire to negotiate so strong as to diminish the credibility of the UK's resoluteness in Soviet eyes.

19. Other NATO Members. The other European NATO countries, including Italy, would generally tend to take their cues from the US, UK, France, and West Germany if the latter were acting in unison. By and large, they regard the Alliance as their best guarantee of national survival and would accept the implementation of a specific program of preparatory measures, designed to stiffen the resolve of the Alliance as a whole. However, there would be demands for full consultation within NATO. Moreover, some member governments, notably the Scandinavians, are faced with strong public attitudes on nuclear warfare and would probably advise against steps which they felt might lead to nuclear war. We believe, however, that in the end

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they would accept NATO decisions, although they would try to minimize their own direct participation in the proposed measures.

20. Non-NATO Countries. Few of the non-NATO countries are concerned with the rights and wrongs of the Berlin question. Those closely linked to the major antagonists see it primarily as a test of strength in which each hopes that his benefactor will prevail. The majority of the countries of Asia and Africa, however, have regarded the issue as a power struggle irrelevant to their own concerns except insofar as it threatens to ignite a general war, as a result of which they would inevitably suffer.

21. The US course of action considered here, however, and Soviet exploitation of the dangers it raised, would make this outcome appear likely to the uncommitted countries. The outcome would probably be increasing pressure in the UN, led by such countries as India, to force the antagonists to negotiation. Although US efforts to convince world opinion of the aggressive nature of Soviet demands on Berlin would have a good effect in some quarters, other sectors of opinion would conclude that US military preparations constituted the more immediate threat to the peace. Much would depend on whatever initiatives the US took to resolve the crisis by negotiation.

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22. At an advanced stage of crisis, local aversion to US overseas bases which might become targets in time of war would probably intensify. This would be most likely in Libya and Morocco, where the governments might seek to deny the US use of its bases, and in Japan, where intense leftist pressure would aim at achieving the same result.

23. East Germany. The East German regime will remain generally responsive to Soviet instructions, particularly in time of crisis. However, Ulbricht will also urge Khrushchev to maintain and increase the pressure of the West to meet the Bloc's demands and to avoid further postponements. Should it appear that the West Berlin escape route might be closed off, the refugee flow from East Germany would probably swell significantly, and the regime would probably respond with stricter controls. As the crisis heightened there might well be spontaneous manifestations of unrest in the East German population, although we believe there would be no general outbreak. We believe that the extent of the response to outright appeals for antiregime activities would depend on a great many unpredictable circumstances including the apparent imminence of military action and cannot be forecast accurately.

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24. Communist China. We believe that a US course of action stressing military preparations in Europe would encourage the Chinese to search for local opportunities through which to advance their influence and power in the Far East at US expense. The Soviets might see advantage in raising a threat to South Korea, in limited Chinese probing actions in the Taiwan Strait or in intensifications of present North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao pressures on the South Vietnamese and Royal Lao governments, believing such actions to be essentially low risk policies but of sufficient seriousness to the US to provide a useful diversion. However, the USSR would probably regard the Berlin question as sufficiently dangerous, and sufficiently susceptible to miscalculation, to make it imprudent to encourage or tolerate the raising of tensions with a simultaneous major and overt challenge in another area.

25. In North Vietnam and Laos, Soviet influence is probably strong enough to allow Moscow's views to prevail over any possible Chinese desire to extreme Bloc action there, at least in a question of whether to undertake overt, major military aggressions. Although the possibility of Chinese Communist extreme military action against Taiwan, Southeast Asia, or South Korea cannot be ruled out, we consider such action unlikely. China would still have to contend with a great US strategic superiority in the Western Pacific. Moreover, Peiping could not, we believe, feel assured of full Soviet

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support in a venture undertaken against Moscow's advice at a time of heavy Soviet engagement in Europe. Finally, the Chinese would have to consider their subsequent relations with the Soviets as likely to be ruptured or severely strained.

26. Thus we believe that extreme Communist military action in the Far East would probably not be undertaken by China, unilaterally or as Moscow's agent, as a consequence of the posited US course of action. However, should the Chinese Nationalists, in an atmosphere of general crisis, make military moves against Communist China, Peiping would react vigorously and would have Soviet backing.

IV. PROBABLE SOVIET COURSES OF ACTION

Soviet Estimate of Western Intentions

27. A central factor in determining Soviet reactions will be their appraisal of ultimate Western military intentions. This appraisal will rest in large measure on the Western military preparations which they observe. But political, economic, and clandestine measures will also play an important part on Soviet calculations of their opponent's general resolve on the Berlin

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question, and specifically on Western willingness to use military force.

28. These Soviet calculations would be exceedingly complicated. The postulated course of action, and particularly the military preparations envisaged, would almost certainly raise substantially the Soviet leaders' estimate of Western willingness, in the most general sense, to defend the Western position in Berlin at successively higher levels of military conflict. But this new appreciation would not provide them with ready indications as to precisely what lengths they could safely proceed with encroachments against Berlin.

The Involvement of Prestige

29. The Soviets would be acutely conscious that the US course of action was raising the stakes in the East-West competition. In developing their concept of a shift in the "world relation of forces," they have identified Berlin as a signal example of the kind of position which the West, in this historically new situation, can no longer maintain. They would regard the postulated course of action as a direct challenge to this central proposition, to which they have committed their prestige and their policy.

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30. Even Western preparations designed to be low-keyed and unostentatious would be interpreted by the Soviets as a challenge to their prestige. In the first place, Soviet propaganda would probably play up and even exaggerate these preparations in an effort to turn sentiment against the US. In the second place, the Soviets wish their contention concerning the new relation of forces not only to be appreciated by the masses, but to be borne in upon Western leaders themselves. They would be greatly unsettled by the prospect that enemy governments, let alone the world at large, would conclude that the USSR, tested on grounds of its own choosing, had been caught out in a bluff. We believe it important to point out that the manner and timing of US preparatory measures would have an important bearing on the degree to which Soviet prestige was committed. In particular, military preparatory measures undertaken with fanfare at an early stage of the developing crisis over Berlin would have the effect of making the Soviet negotiating position more rigid.

31. In this challenge to Soviet prestige we recognize an element which could cause the USSR to deviate from its hitherto careful calculations of risk and advantage. At the least, they would feel compelled to respond with a strong public posture

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and military measures of their own in order to prove that they could not be intimidated. At the most, they might feel impelled to proceed further with their announced unilateral intentions.

Other Factors

32. Within this range, the Soviet reaction will be influenced in important ways by various immediate factors. One of these is the manner in which the Berlin problem develops in the coming months. The Soviets are at present hinting at the possibility of new negotiations in a way which indicates that they hope to put the Berlin question into diplomatic channels before a full-scale threat to their prestige develops. At a later stage, perhaps after they had already taken some moves to proceed unilaterally, they might find it more difficult to agree to terms of negotiation which the West could accept. Another factor is the degree of Western disunity which they perceive; if this disunity is great enough, they might consider it advantageous to respond with intense pressures in order to maximize the political costs of the US courses of action, confident that when a showdown loomed, they could avert it by postponing a threatened step. Another important factor would be the extent to which

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Western diplomatic, political, and economic measures had convinced the Soviets that recourse to unilateral action would be contrary to their interests. A final element is the consistency and perseverance displayed by the US itself; having persuaded themselves in the past that the US almost certainly would not go to general war over the Berlin issue, the Soviet leaders would be prone to hold to this estimate if they detected contradictions or uncertainty in the American stance.

The Soviet Negotiations Position

33. We continue to believe that the Soviets hope to achieve their aims in Berlin through negotiations. Their more recent pressure is intended to bring about negotiations on terms most favorable to themselves. We have previously estimated that the minimum Soviet position in such negotiations would probably be an interim agreement providing some de facto recognition of the GDR and arrangements for Berlin which at least laid the groundwork for further Communist advances at a later date, or perhaps only the second of these.^{3/} How might the postulated US course of action affect the Soviet position in future negotiations?

^{3/} NIE 11-7-61, "Soviet Short-Term Intentions Regarding Berlin and Germany," dated 25 April 1961.

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34. The way in which the two sides arrive at negotiations could have a decisive influence on the answer to this question. Negotiations might arise in an atmosphere of crisis in which the Soviets viewed their prestige as directly and visibly challenged. In this instance, for the reasons we have cited, we believe that their position would harden, their minimum demands would rise, and they would be more willing to allow the talks to break down. In taking this line, they would be concerned primarily to deal with the immediate threat to the image of their general power position, an image which they conceive to be, in political terms, as important as its actual substance. In this event, they would probably plan to revert to a course of unilateral action, calculating that they could keep each small, individual step within the bounds of reasonable risk in the light of fluctuating Western readiness and resolve to oppose them.

35. On the other hand, negotiations might begin in circumstances when the Soviet leaders, although aware of the unfolding US course of action, did not consider that this course had gone so far as to increase drastically the extent to which their prestige was already engaged. In this case, they might choose to work toward a solution which reduced the immediate tensions

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surrounding the Berlin issue and at the same time did not foreclose the possibility of future advances at a more propitious time. They might settle, for example, for a relatively innocuous agreement which required neither side to absorb a dramatic defeat, or provided for continuing lower-level negotiations, or both.

36. In either event, however, we believe that the postulated US course of action, if carried through skillfully and without serious breaches in Western ranks, would cause the Soviets to adopt a further measure of caution in their approach to the Berlin problem. So long as Western readiness remained high, and Western resolve appeared to them firm, they would almost certainly raise their estimate of the risks and political liabilities associated with unilateral action. They would be equally concerned, however, to preserve the image of the USSR as a strong and confident power which was sooner or later to have its way in Berlin. It remains possible that, at a time of intense stress, these conflicting yet fundamental considerations would lead the Soviets into an action rash by even their own standards, or into a miscalculation. We think it more likely, however, that they would foresee and forestall such a critical point and moderate

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their policy as necessary, intending to return to the attack at a later and safer time. In making this estimate, we are conscious that, as the postulated course of action unfolded, many unpredictable factors would come into play which make it impossible to reach a final judgment today with any very high degree of assurance. This suggests the high importance of a continuing review of all elements of the situation.

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